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(54) TRAIN WHEEL BEARING TEMPERATURE DETECTION

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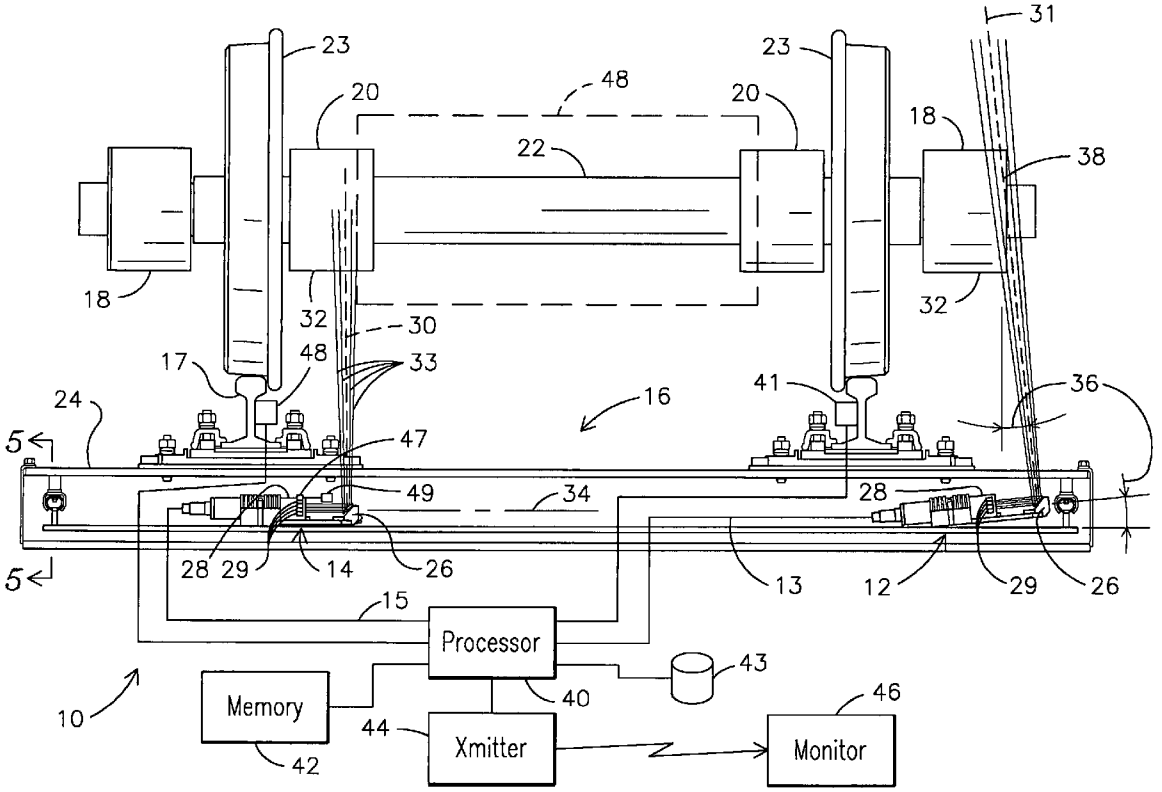
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(57) ABSTRACT

A system (**10**) for sensing a condition of a rail vehicle undercarriage component (e.g., **18**) includes a sensor (e.g., **12**) comprising an array of infrared sensing elements (**29**). Each of the elements may be aimed at a different region of a target area (e.g., **32**) of a rail vehicle undercarriage component to generate respective scanning waveform signature data corresponding to each different region. The sensor may be oriented so that at least one of the elements receives unobstructed infrared emissions (e.g., **33**) from the undercarriage component of a rail vehicle passing the sensor. The system also includes a memory (**42**) for storing characteristic waveform signature data corresponding to known undercarriage components. In addition, the system includes a processor (**40**) for processing the scanning waveform signature data with respect to the characteristic waveform signature data stored in memory to identify a type of the rail vehicle undercarriage component being scanned and to extract information indicative of a health condition of the rail vehicle undercarriage component being identified.



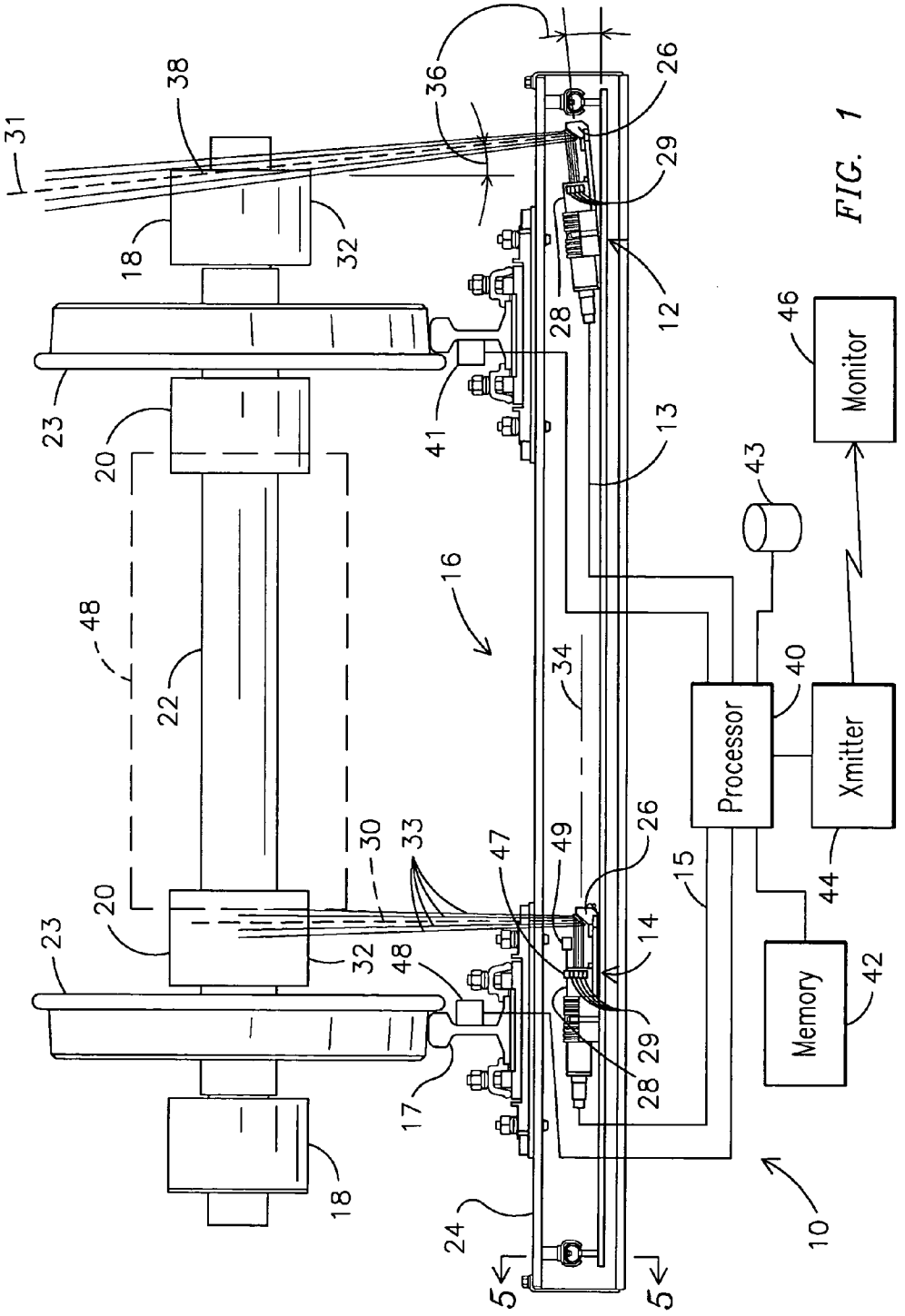

31
38
36
26
29
18
32
28
12
46
Monitor
23
20
41
13
43
16
48
22
34
40
Processor
Xmitter
30
33
47
49
26
15
44
20
23
32
48
14
Memory
42
29
28
17
18
24
5
5
10

FIG. 1

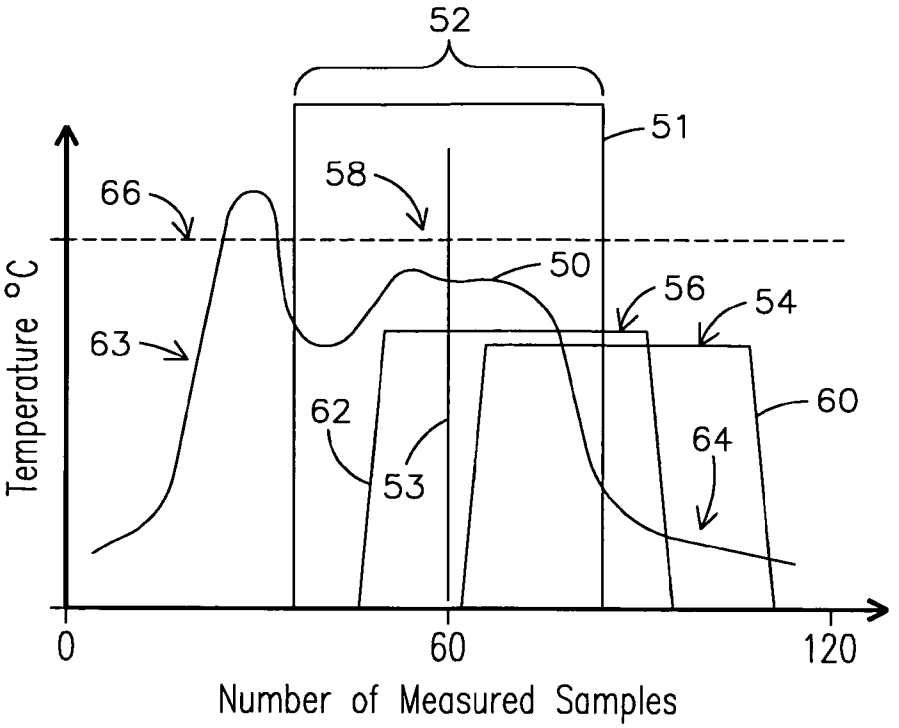

52
51
58
66
50
56
54
63
62
60
64
53
Temperature °C
0
60
120
Number of Measured Samples

FIG. 2

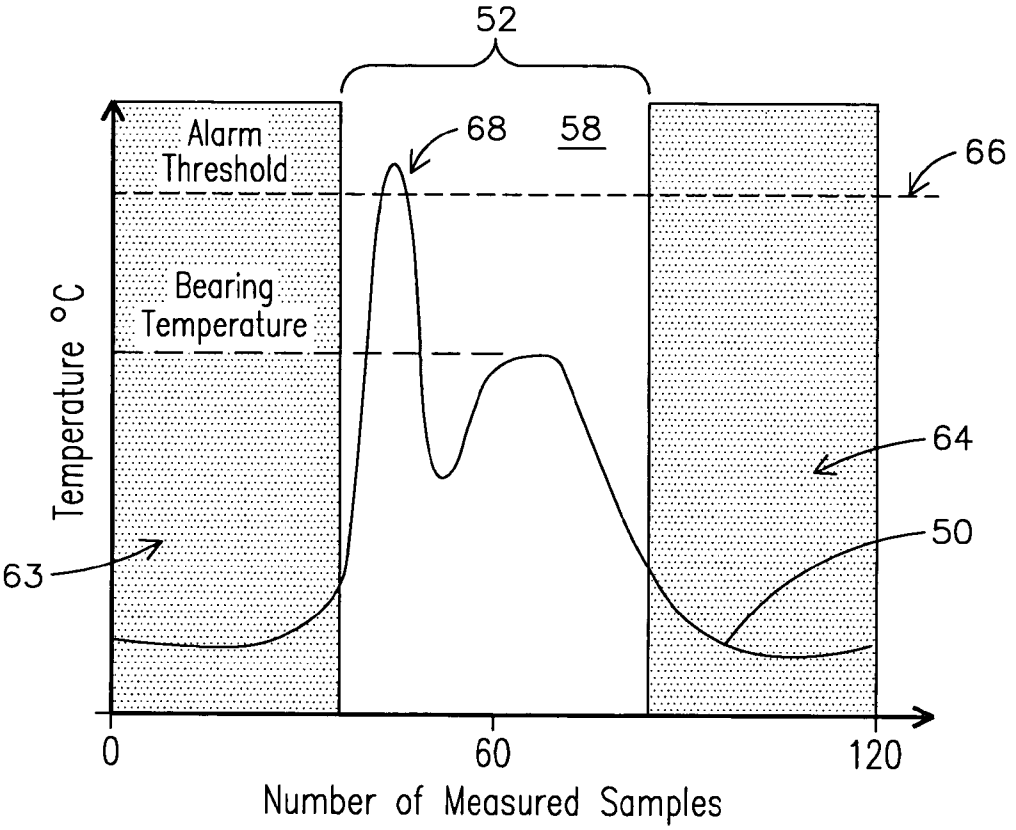

52
Alarm Threshold
68
58
66
Bearing Temperature
64
50
63
Temperature °C
0
60
120
Number of Measured Samples

FIG. 3

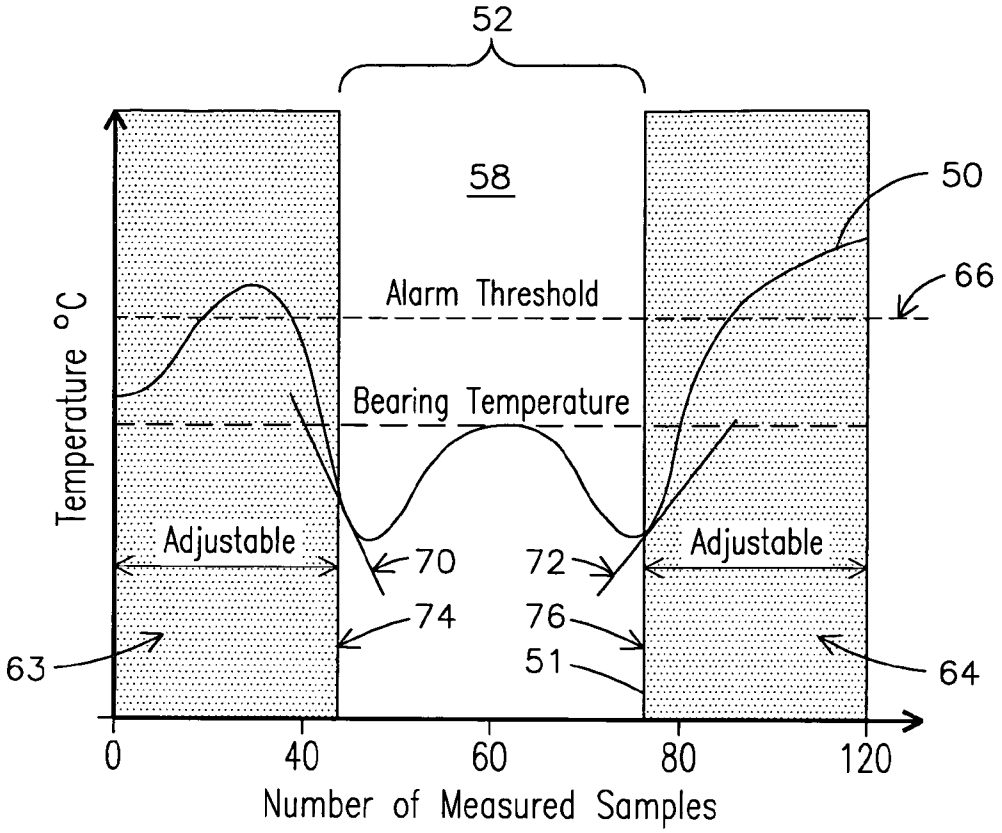

52
58
50
66
Alarm Threshold
Bearing Temperature
Temperature °C
Adjustable
70
72
Adjustable
74
76
63
51
64
0
40
60
80
120
Number of Measured Samples

FIG. 4

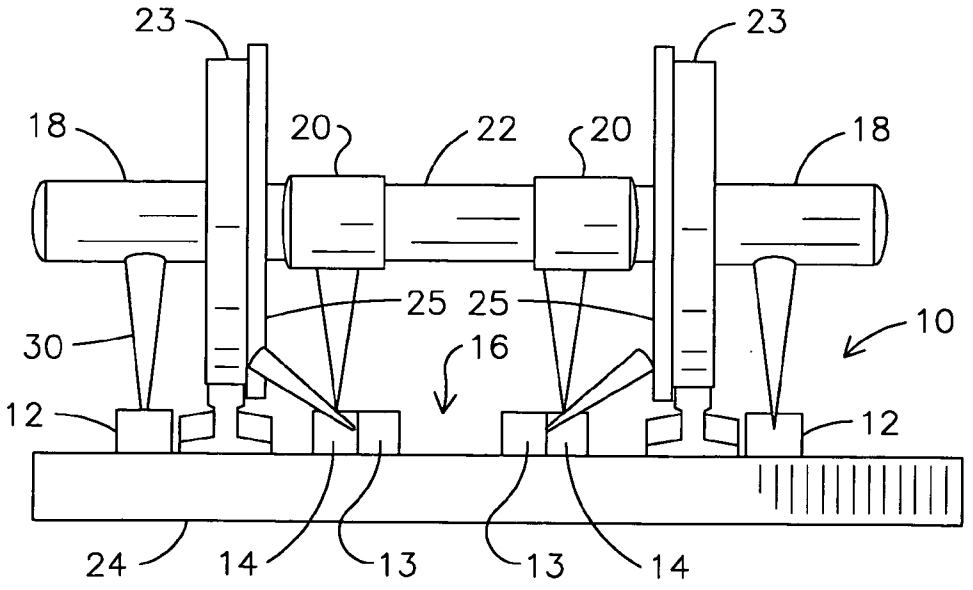

23
23
18
20
22
20
18
25
25
10
30
16
12
12
24
14
13
13
14

FIG. 11

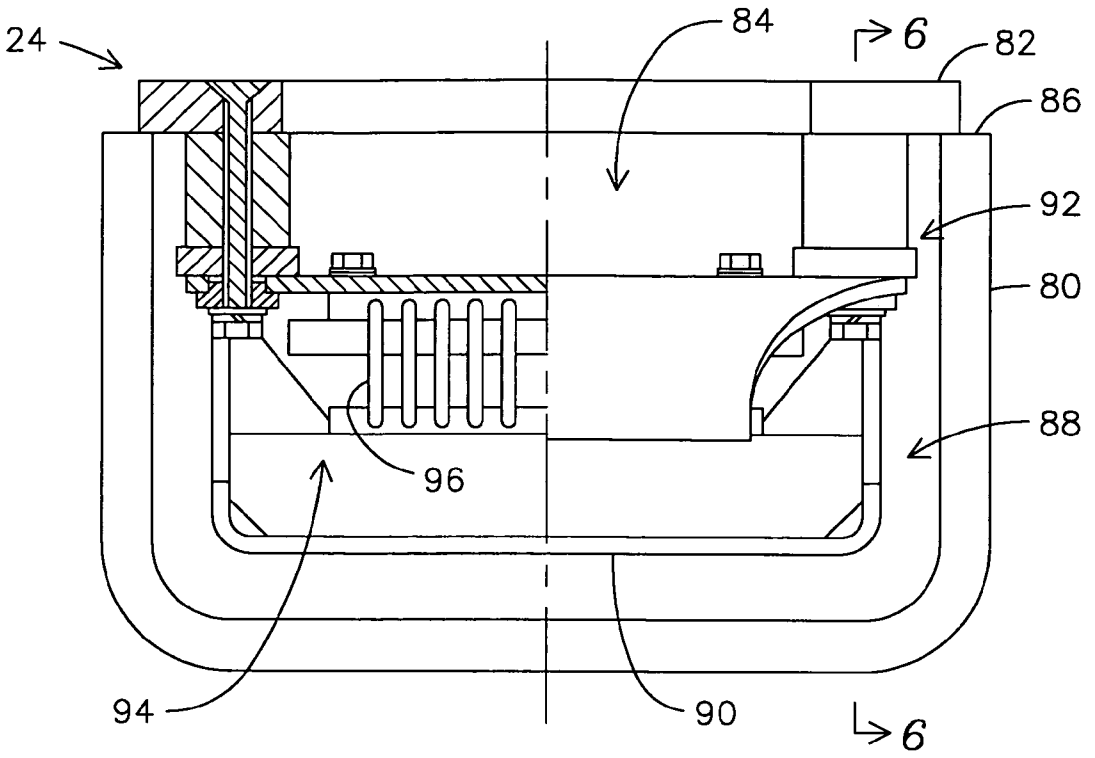


FIG. 5

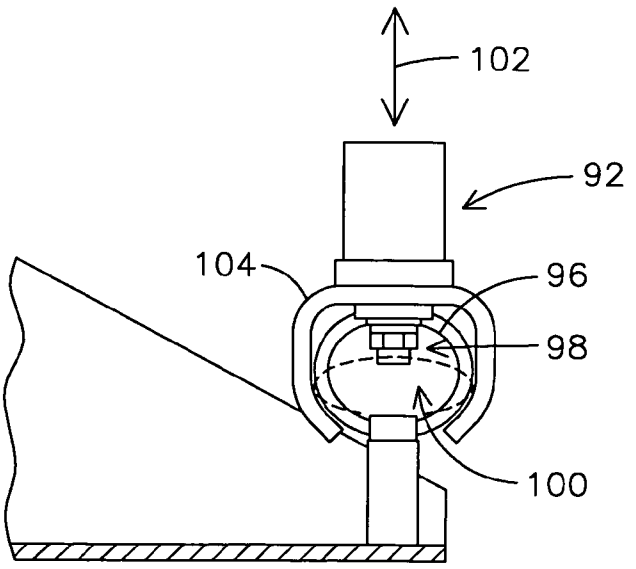
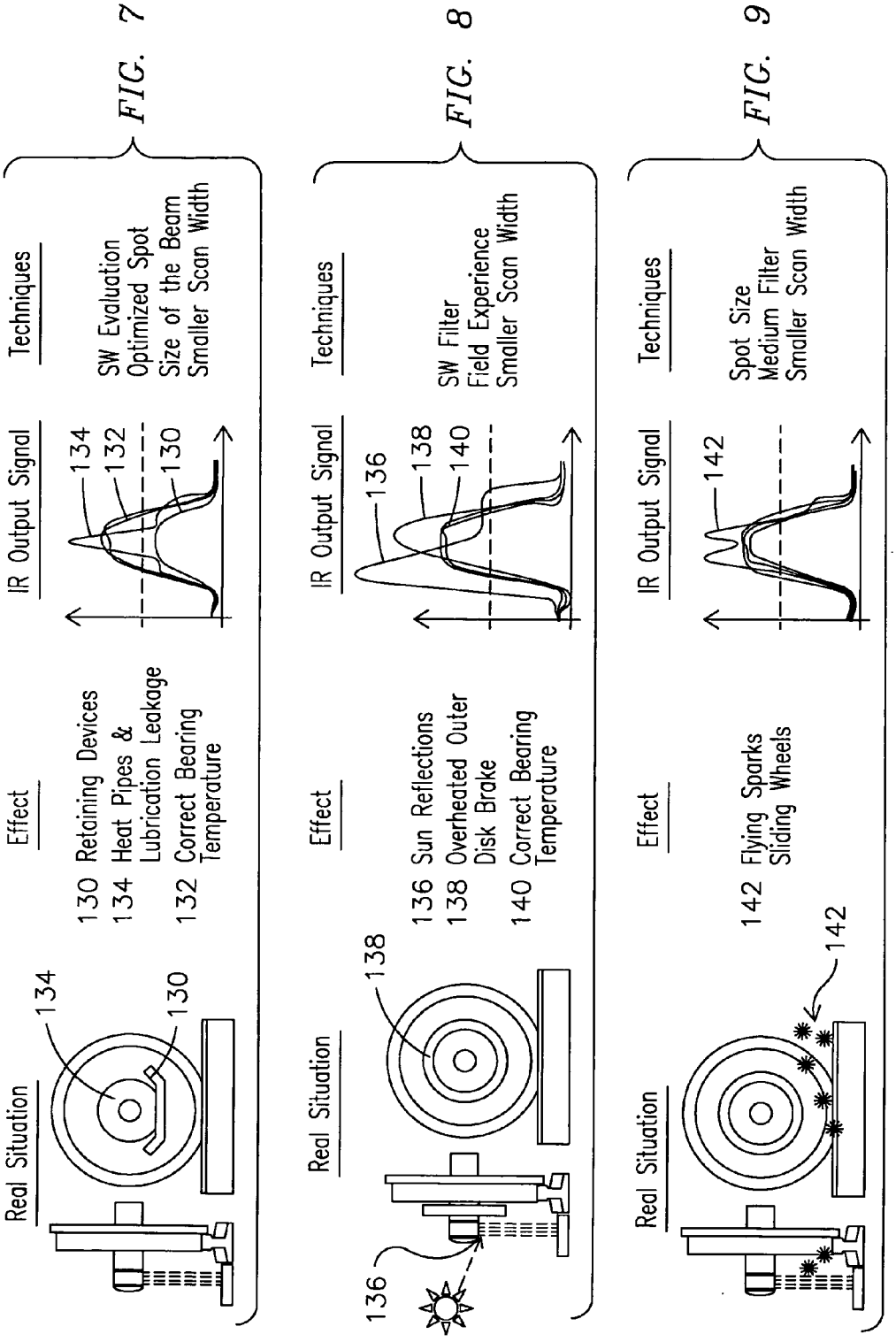


FIG. 6


Real Situation
134
130
Effect
130 Retaining Devices
134 Heat Pipes & Lubrication Leakage
132 Correct Bearing Temperature
IR Output Signal
134
132
130
Techniques
SW Evaluation
Optimized Spot
Size of the Beam
Smaller Scan Width
FIG. 7
Real Situation
138
136
Effect
136 Sun Reflections
138 Overheated Outer Disk Brake
140 Correct Bearing Temperature
IR Output Signal
136
138
140
Techniques
SW Filter
Field Experience
Smaller Scan Width
FIG. 8
Real Situation
142
Effect
142 Flying Sparks Sliding Wheels
IR Output Signal
142
Techniques
Spot Size
Medium Filter
Smaller Scan Width
FIG. 9

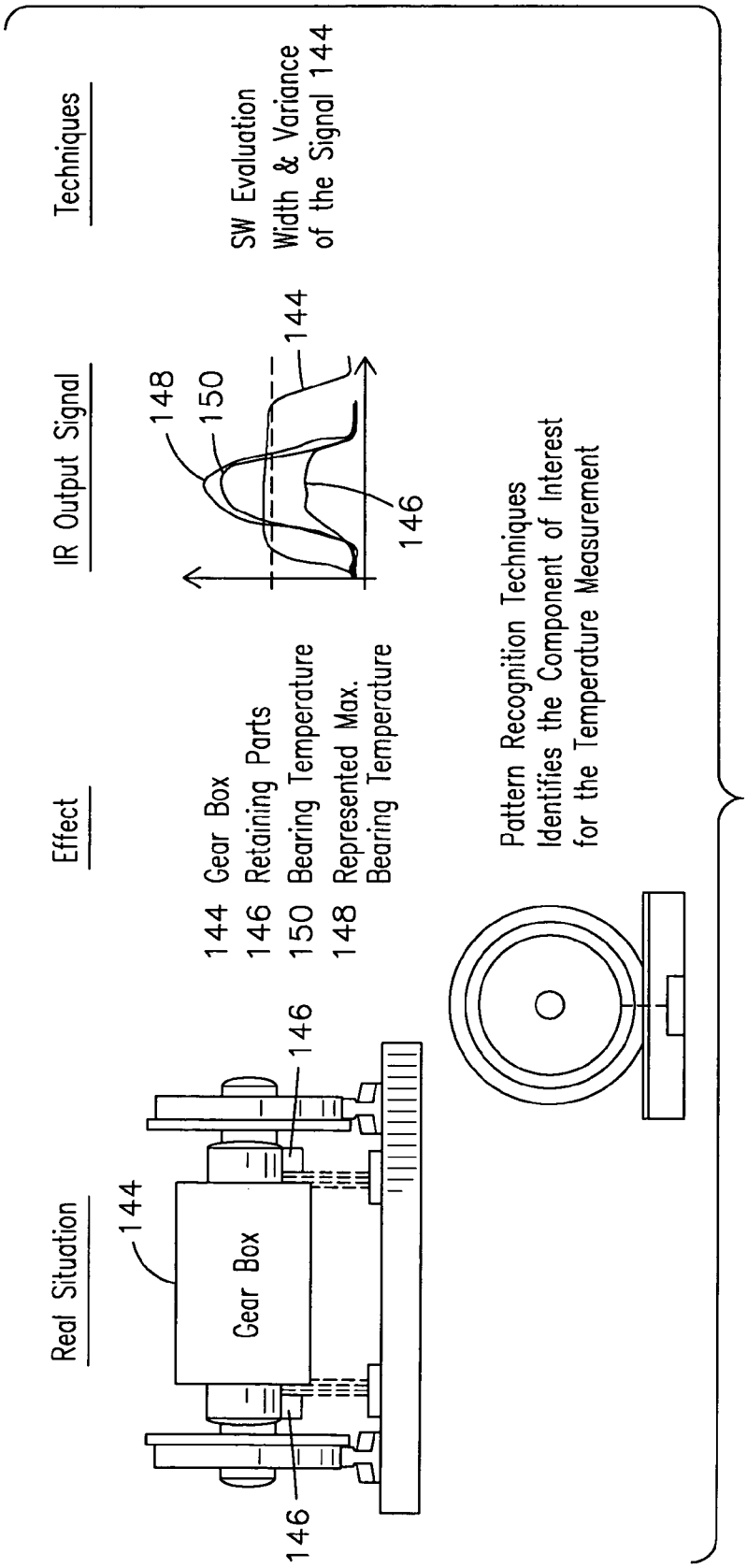

Real Situation
144
Gear Box
146
146
Effect
144 Gear Box
146 Retaining Parts
150 Bearing Temperature
148 Represented Max. Bearing Temperature
IR Output Signal
148
150
144
146
Techniques
SW Evaluation
Width & Variance
of the Signal 144
Pattern Recognition Techniques
Identifies the Component of Interest
for the Temperature Measurement

FIG. 10

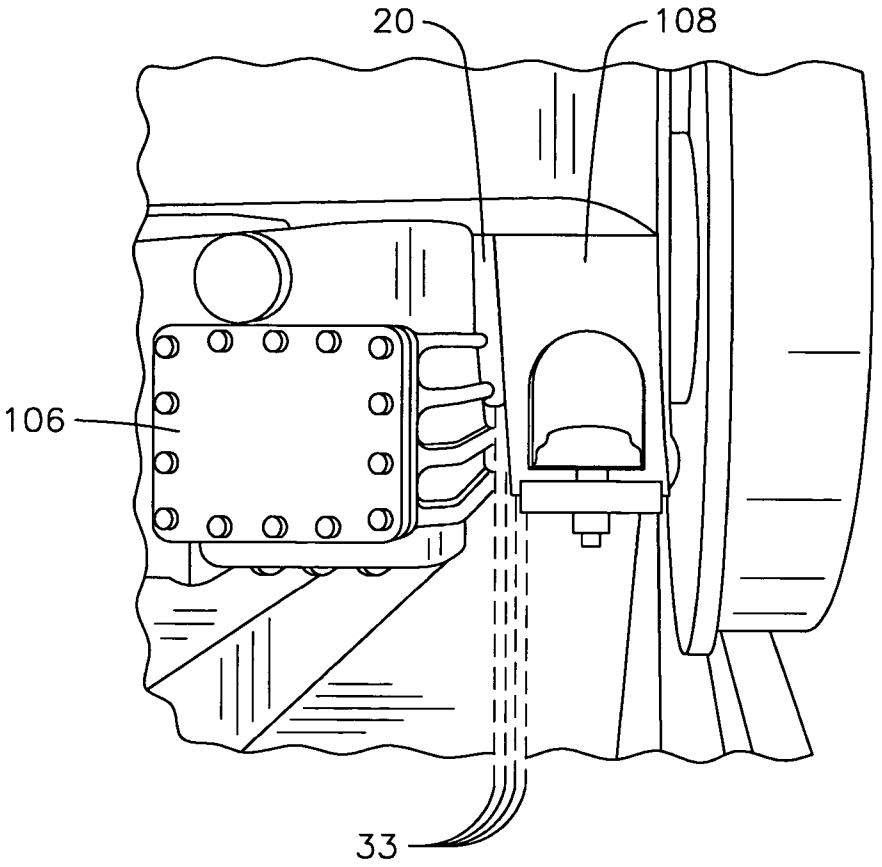


FIG. 12

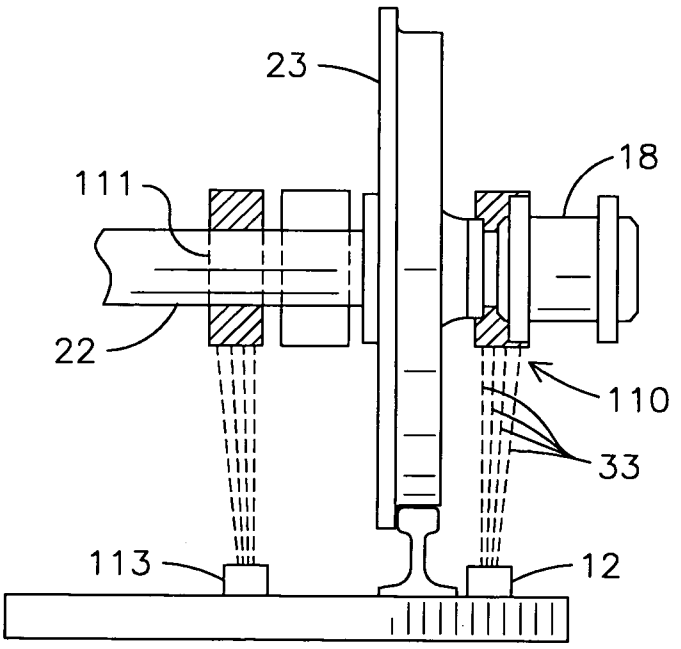


FIG. 14

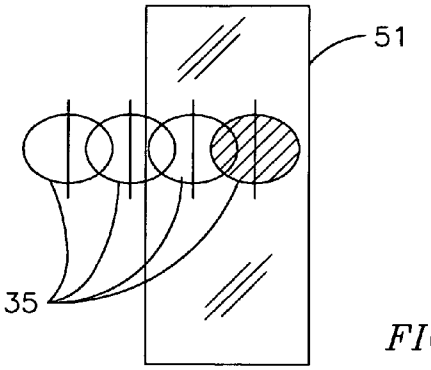


FIG. 13A

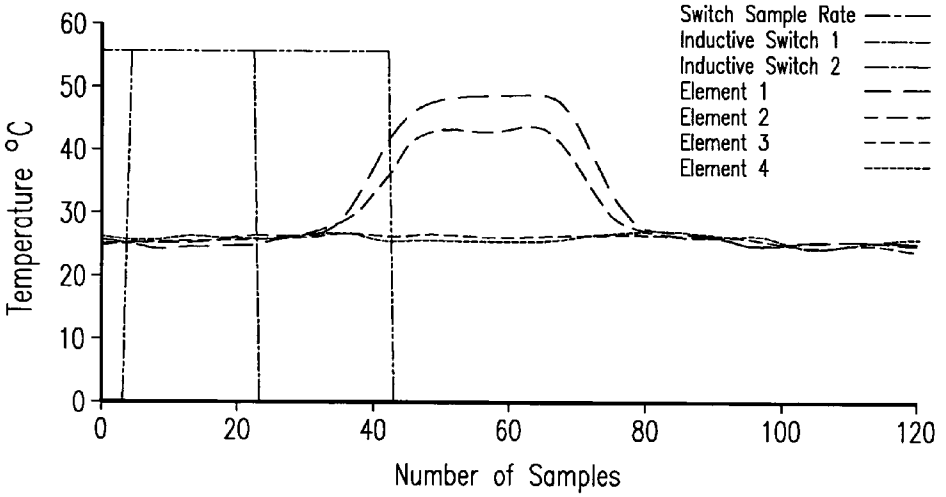


FIG. 13B

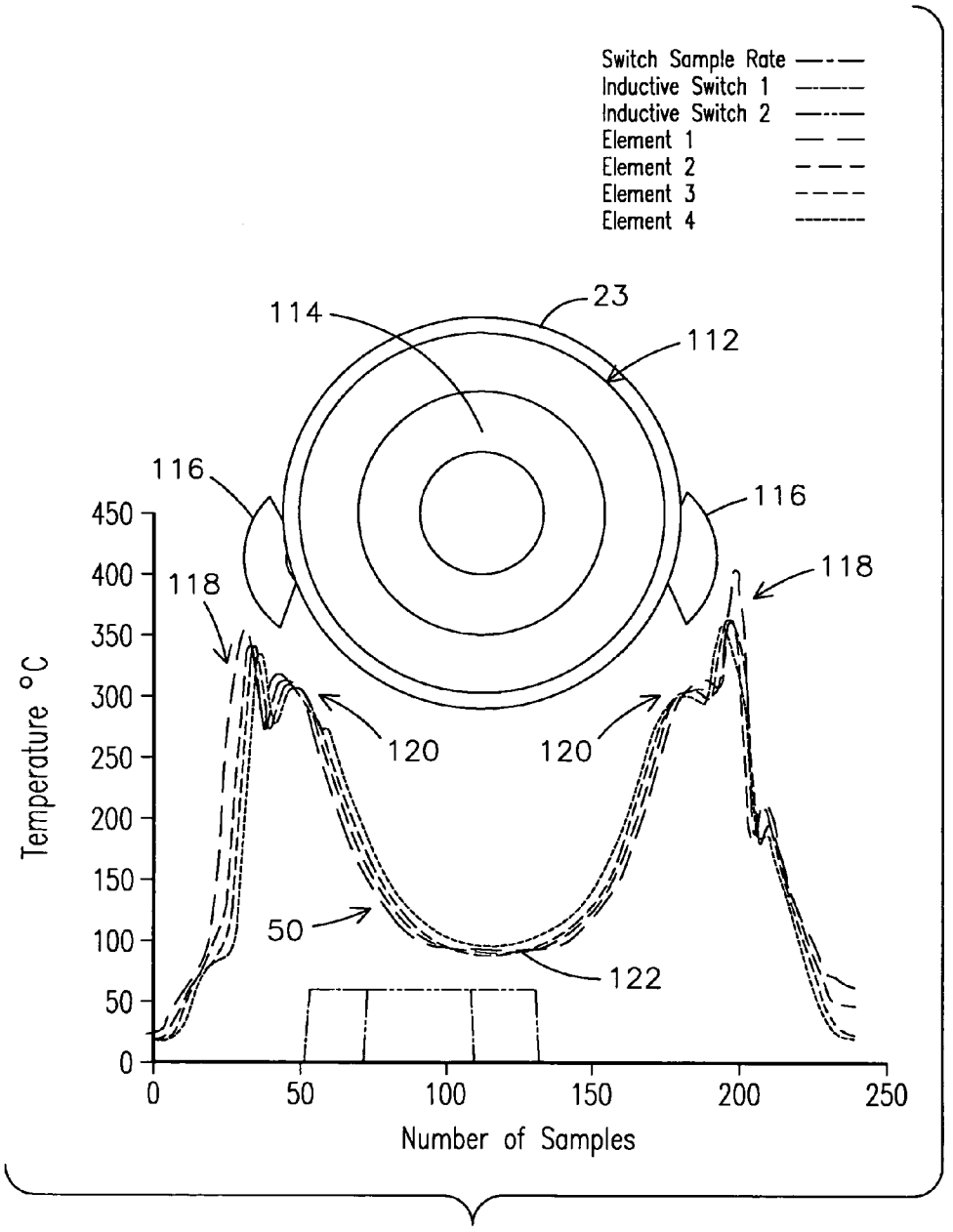

Switch Sample Rate
Inductive Switch 1
Inductive Switch 2
Element 1
Element 2
Element 3
Element 4
23
114
112
116
116
118
118
120
120
50
122
Temperature °C
450
400
350
300
250
200
150
100
50
0
0
50
100
150
200
250
Number of Samples

FIG. 15

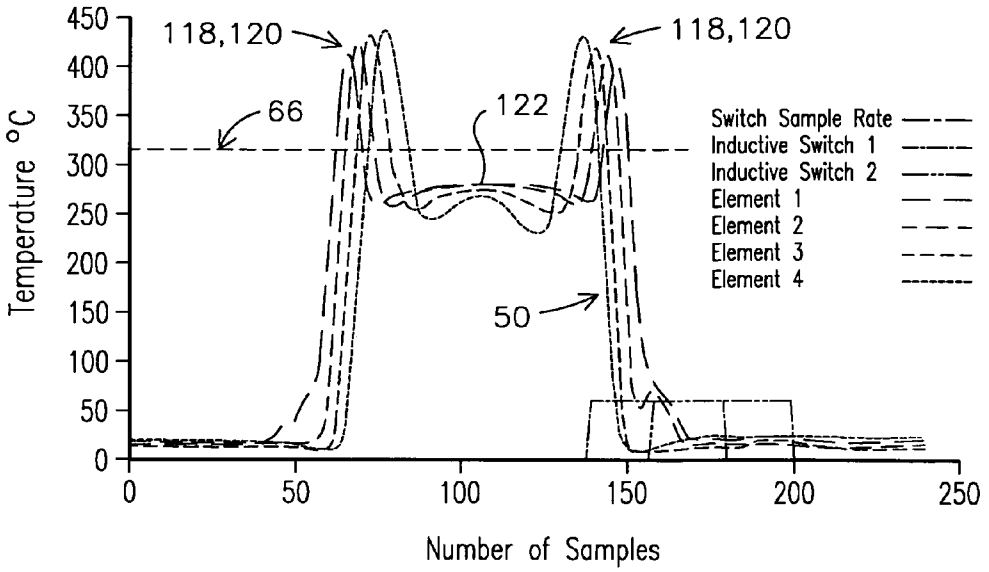


FIG. 16A

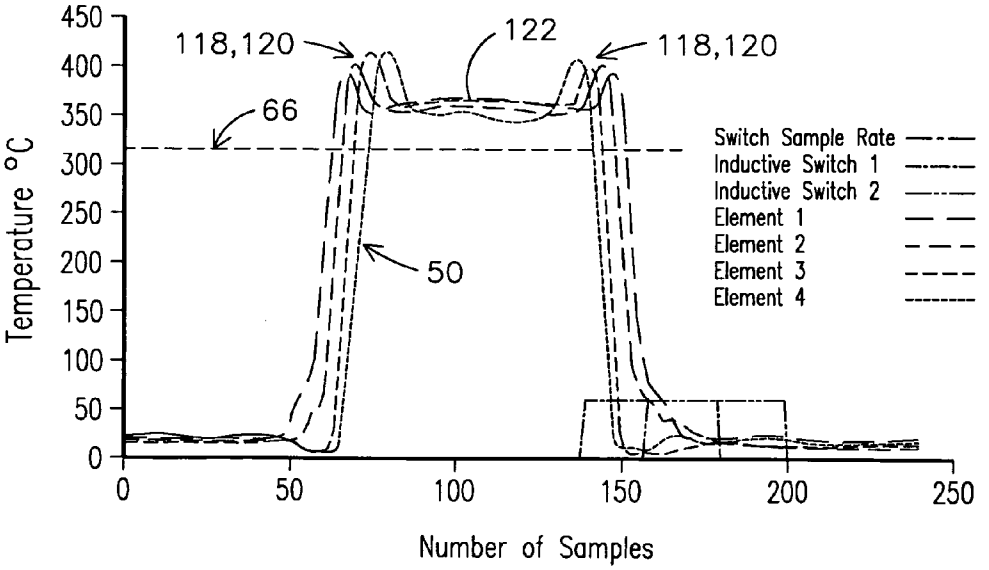


FIG. 16B

TRAIN WHEEL BEARING TEMPERATURE DETECTION

CROSS REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

[0001] This application claims benefit of the May 24, 2005 filing date of U.S. provisional patent application No. 60/684,063, the May 17, 2005 filing date of U.S. provisional patent application No. 60/681,858, and the Dec. 6, 2004 filing date of U.S. provisional patent application No. 60/633,536.

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

[0002] This invention relates generally to the field of rail transportation, and more particularly, to determining a condition of train undercarriage components.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0003] The safe and reliable operation of a railroad system is dependent upon the integrity of the rolling mechanisms of the vehicles traveling over the rails. For example, it is important to monitor a condition of train wheel bearings to determine if a degree of wear on the bearing indicates that the bearings need to be inspected and repaired or replaced. Worn or damaged bearings increase the rolling friction of the axle thereby increasing the power required to pull the train. In addition, worn or damaged bearings may cause excessive wear to the train axle and, in the case of failure of the bearing, may even cause the axle to lock up, preventing rotation of the wheel, resulting in a potential fire hazard due to the heat build up and potential sparking caused by friction of the locked wheel scraping along the rail.

[0004] Bearing temperatures may be directly monitored using rail car mounted temperature sensors, such as thermocouples, disposed near the bearings. However, such techniques having proven to be unreliable and/or relatively costly to operate and maintain. One way of indirectly monitoring the a condition train wheel bearings is to sense a temperature of the wheel bearing indirectly through a bearing box surrounding the wheel bearing on a rail car of a train. For example, infrared radiation (IR) sensors have been mounted along a rail to detect IR energy emitted by an outer wheel bearing and indicative of a temperature of the wheel bearing, as the rail car passes the IR sensor. However, such a system may be limited to a certain rail car wheel configuration that allows an unimpeded sensing path from the sensor to the bearing box, which may not be achievable for all rail car wheel configurations. Furthermore, inner wheel bearings used on some rail cars and locomotives have proven difficult to monitor due to sensing paths being blocked by suspension components and the differences among inner wheel bearing arrangements. In addition, the presence of IR sources near an inner bearing being monitored, such as gear boxes or suspension springs, and the effects of lateral movement of the axle bringing other IR sources into a sensing path, such as during wheel hunting, may result in erroneous IR readings for the bearing. Other IR sources which may interfere with a temperature measurement of a train wheel bearing may include hot lubricant leakage, sun reflections, differential heating on different sides of a train, sparks from skidding wheels, and brake hardware, such as brake disks. Accordingly, an improved system and method for sensing a temperature of train wheel bearings is desired.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0005] **FIG. 1** is a cross sectional illustration of an exemplary train wheel bearing temperature detection system, a portion of the system being embedded in a metal railroad tie, or sleeper.

[0006] **FIG. 2** illustrates an exemplary graph of temperature versus IR sampling points over time for an IR radiation profile received from a train wheel bearing by the detection system of **FIG. 1**.

[0007] **FIG. 3** illustrates another exemplary graph of temperature versus IR sampling points over time for an IR radiation profile received from a train wheel bearing by the detection system of **FIG. 1** and shows an energy peak.

[0008] **FIG. 4** illustrates another exemplary graph of temperature versus IR sampling points over time for an IR radiation profile received from a train wheel bearing by the detection system of **FIG. 1** and shows IR energy contributions received from components other than a train wheel bearing.

[0009] **FIG. 5** illustrates a cross sectional view of the sleeper of **FIG. 1** taken along line **5-5** and shows a suspension for the system mounted within the sleeper.

[0010] **FIG. 6** illustrates partial cross sectional view of the suspension of **FIG. 5** taken along line **6-6**.

[0011] **FIGS. 7-10** illustrate exemplary conditions of a train wheel and the corresponding IR signal profiles that may be obtained from an embodiment of the train wheel bearing measurement system.

[0012] **FIG. 11** is a schematic representation of an exemplary train wheel bearing temperature detection system.

[0013] **FIG. 12** illustrates exemplary IR scanning paths for scanning an inner bearing between a traction motor and a carrier bracket of a locomotive.

[0014] **FIG. 13A** is a schematic diagram showing area coverage of exemplary IR scanning paths with in a detection window corresponding to a sensed bearing.

[0015] **FIG. 13B** shows an exemplary graph of a sensed temperature profile corresponding to the area coverage of exemplary IR scanning paths of **FIG. 13A**.

[0016] **FIG. 14** illustrates exemplary IR scanning paths for scanning an inner raceway portion of an outer bearing.

[0017] **FIG. 15** shows rail wheel components superimposed over an exemplary an IR radiation profile received from a train wheel bearing by the detection system of **FIG. 1**.

[0018] **FIG. 16A** shows an exemplary graph of a sensed temperature profile indicative of a wheel exhibiting a temperature below an alarm threshold.

[0019] **FIG. 16B** shows an exemplary graph of a sensed temperature profile indicative of a wheel exhibiting a temperature above an alarm threshold.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

[0020] A train undercarriage component temperature detection system may be used to obtain data, such as IR

emission data, indicative of a temperature of a sensed railcar wheel or wheel bearing as the vehicle rolls past a sensing device of the system. The system may include a sensing devices oriented to receive unobstructed IR emissions from rail car undercarriage components. In one aspect, a sensor may include an array of sensing elements sensing adjacent regions of a target area of a component, such as an inner bearing and an outer bearing of an axle, respectively. The data received from the sensing devices is then processed to extract information indicative of a health of the respective sensed component. The data may be processed to recognize a characteristic waveform profile corresponding to a known component type and reduce spurious IR emissions received from IR sources in the vicinity of a sensed component. A suspension for the system mounted within a railroad tie, or sleeper, is also provided to reduce the effects of shock and vibration that may be experienced by the system. Waveform analysis methods may be used on the data to identify a type of component and then, based on the type of component being scanned, identify conditions of the scanned component that may be indicative of an abnormal health condition.

[0021] **FIG. 1** illustrates an exemplary train undercarriage component temperature detection system **10** for detecting wheel bearing temperatures. **FIG. 11** is schematic representation of such a system **10**. One or more sensors, such as outer bearing sensor **12** and inner bearing sensor **14**, may be placed in a position along a track **16** to obtain data from wheel bearings, such as an inner bearing **20** and an outer bearing **18**, of a train axle **22** as the axle passes the sensors **12**, **14**. The sensors **12**, **14** may be positioned in a rail bed of the track **16**, such as within a cross tie or sleeper **24** adapted to contain the sensors **12**, **14**, and to receive IR emissions from the bearings **18**, **20**. In an aspect of the invention, each sensor **12**, **14** may include a mirror **26** to redirect IR emissions into a receiver **28** of the sensor **12**, **14** to allow the receiver **28** to be oriented horizontally within the sleeper **24**. The sensors **12**, **14** may be positioned along an axis **34** parallel to the train axle **22** to receive IR emissions emitted from a bottom **32** of a bearing **18**, **20** along a path **30** perpendicular to the axle **22**. The emissions may be redirected by the mirror **26**, for example, at a right angle with respect to the path **30**, into the receiver **28**.

[0022] As shown in **FIG. 11**, wheel IR sensors **13** may be placed in a position along the track **16** to obtain IR emission data from the wheels **23**, such as inner faces **25** of the wheels **23**, as the axle passes the sensors **13**. In another aspect of the invention shown in **FIG. 14**, a portion of the train axle **22**, such as an axle portion **111** near an inner bearing **20**, may be targeted by a sensor **113** to obtain IR emission data from the axle portion **111**.

[0023] Returning to **FIG. 1**, each sensor **12**, **14** may further include a plurality of infrared sensing elements **29**, such as IR radiation sensitive diode detectors or an IR sensitive planar array having individually resolvable pixels, arranged, for example, vertically within the receiver **28** to receive respective portions **33** of the IR emissions radiated by respective bearings **18**, **20**. Accordingly, each infrared sensing element **29** receives a respective portion of IR energy from a target area, such as the bottom **32** or end **38** of the bearing **18**, **20**, spaced away from portions of IR emissions received by other IR sensing elements **29** of the sensor. In an aspect of the invention, the sensors **12**,**14** may include five elements **29**, such as Mercury/Cadmium/Tellurium (HgCdTe) elements, positioned in an array within the sensor **12**, **14**. Four elements may be used for scanning, and a fifth element **47** may be used for calibrating the other elements **29**. The calibrating element **47** may be positioned to view a reference Peltier effect semiconductor cooler **49** maintained at a desired temperature, such as −40 degrees Celsius, to provide a DC-coupled benchmark for sensed heat signatures. Such a design may allow an absolute temperature measurement accuracy of ±0.1 degree Celsius. The sensors **12**, **14** may transmit through a zinc-selenid lens and view the railcar through an external shutter mounted on the instrumented tie, with a front surface mirror **26** in the viewing path. The mirror **26** may include a gold front surface to resist tarnishing or bonding with other materials. The mirror **26** may be rotated, such as at 10,000 revolutions per minute, to fling off contaminants that may come to rest on the mirror **26**.

[0024] While the perpendicular orientation of the path **30** may allow the sensors **12**, **14** to receive IR radiation unblocked by other components, (such as suspension components positioned near the bearings **12**, **14**) an unimpeded path from the bearing **18**, **20** to the mirror **26** may not be possible to achieve in some cases. For example, the bottom **32** of a locomotive outer bearing **18** may be obscured by a shroud (not shown), thereby rendering it difficult to maintain a clear path to the bottom **32** of the outer bearing **18** for receiving IR emissions. In an aspect of the invention, the outer bearing sensor **12** may be inclined from the axis **34** by an angle **36** so that an outer bearing imaging path **31** may be inclined away from perpendicular with respect to the axle **22** by corresponding angle **36**. For example, the bearing imaging path **31** may be positioned at an acute angle with respect to a face **38** of the outer wheel bearing **18**. Consequently, an IR emission radiated from an un-obscured portion of the outer bearing **18**, such as the face **38** of the outer bearing **18**, may be sensed by the sensor **12** positioned in the railbed below the train without interference from components positioned near the bearing **18**.

[0025] The IR emissions received from the respective portions **33** and converted into respective signals indicative of a strength of the IR energy received may be provided to a processor **40** for further processing of the received signals, for example, to determine indications of abnormal bearing heating. In an embodiment of the invention, the processor **40** may be disposed remotely from the sleeper **24** and may be connected to the sensors **12**, **14** via respective cables **15**, **45**. The processor **40** may further receive wheel passage information provided by one or more wheel sensors **48** such as inductive sensors, for example, spaced longitudinally along rail **17**. The processor **40** may be in communication with memory **42**, for example, to receive analytically and/or experimentally derived radiation pattern information from the memory **42** to perform pattern recognition analysis in accordance with and aspect of the invention. Processed information, such as information identifying a bearing condition of a sensed wheel bearing, may be transmitted via transmitter **44** to a central monitor **46** for reporting and/or notification of a degraded bearing condition requiring servicing.

[0026] The processor **40** also be in communication with a train database **43** having reference information for each passing vehicle to the relative axle count within the train and the relative vehicle position within the train. For example,

the reference information may be downloaded from a remote source via transmitter **44** being configured as a transceiver for receiving and transmitting information. In another aspect, specific registered car number data from an external system, such as an AEI tag reader system, may be input to the database **43** to tag the vehicle data with a unique vehicle registration number.

[**0027**] In an aspect of the invention, the system may **10** configured for acquiring **120** samples per element **29** per bearing detected at speeds from about 1.86 mph to 310 miles per hour. The sampling rate may be scaled to a train velocity, so that regardless of the train speed, 120 samples per element **29** per bearing measured may be captured and 240 samples per element **29** per wheel measured. Bearing temperatures up to 356 degrees Fahrenheit may be detected and wheel temperatures up to 1,112 degrees Fahrenheit may be measured with the system **10**.

[**0028**] The prior art techniques for sensing IR energy radiated by a train wheel bearing for detecting a wheel bearing having temperature higher than a normal operating temperature generate unreliable indicators under certain circumstances, thereby resulting in false hot bearing indications causing unnecessary stoppage of the train to inspect the bearings, or missed hot bearing that should have been inspected. Applicant has found that processing of the IR energy measurement data under the techniques set forth in this invention can provide hot bearing determinations that are more reliable and accurate. Some problems experienced when attempting to perform remote IR energy measurements of train wheel bearings include spurious IR noise, IR sources close to the bearing, such as springs or gear boxes, different configurations of train wheel bearings and associated suspension and wheel components, and movement of the train axle and associated components, into a detection path of an IR sensor, such as may be experienced during a wheel hunting condition. In particular, the inner bearing **20** of a train axle **22** may be positioned close to a gear box **39** (indicated by dotted line) that may also be a source of IR energy that may interfere with the IR emissions emitted by the bearing **20**. Consequently, a portion of the gear box **39** or other component radiating IR energy, such as a suspension spring (not shown), may provide one or more portions **33** of IR emissions to the sensor **14**, such as when the axle moves laterally during hunting, resulting in an IR energy level that erroneously includes an IR energy component from both the inner bearing **20** and one or more other IR sources, such as the gear box **39**. In another configuration shown in **FIG. 12**, an inner bearing may be viewable through a relatively narrow aperture between a traction motor **106** and a carrier bracket **108** of a locomotive, making it difficult to obtain an accurate temperature reading of the inner bearing due to interference of the traction motor **106** and a carrier bracket **108**.

[**0029**] Furthermore, geometric differences among configurations of train axle, wheel, and suspension components may result in erroneous readings. For example, if the measurement system **10** is configured to sense a certain detection target area for a corresponding geometric configuration of train axle, wheel, and suspension component, but encounters a different configuration (such as a larger gear box entering the field of inspection or an outer bearing having a different height above the rail bed than the system is configured for due, for example, to a different wheel diameter) the measurement system **10** may sense an erroneous IR reading. It will be appreciated that aspects of the present invention may be used for distinguishing between one or more different components that may enter a relatively hot condition indicative of a component malfunction. For example, it may be desirable to determine whether a bearing or a gear box is a component with a hot condition. Accordingly, the techniques of the present invention are not limited to a detection of bearing conditions because such techniques may also be applied for detecting malfunction conditions in other mechanical components such as the gearbox, brake disks, and/or brake pads etc.

[**0030**] An improved detection system capable of identifying elevated bearing temperatures for a variety of train wheel bearing, axle, wheel, and suspension component configurations, and conditions of these train components includes performing one or more innovative processes on the received IR energy to determine a temperature of the bearing from which a health condition of the bearing may be inferred. **FIG. 2** illustrates an exemplary graph of temperature versus temperature sampling points over time for received IR emissions from a train wheel bearing. **FIG. 2** shows wheel detection pulses **54**, **56** generated, for example, by inductive wheel detectors **48** as a train wheel **23** passes the detector **48** (as shown **FIG. 1**.) IR emission data may be continuously collected by the processor **40** monitoring the data received from the IR sensors **12**, **14**, relative, for example, to a time when a wheel **23** is initially detected, as indicated by a rising edge **62** of a first pulse **56**. Data collection may be completed at a time relative to a falling edge of wheel detection pulse, such as a falling edge **60** of the second pulse **54**. Accordingly, a timing of IR emission capture may be correlated with arrival of a wheel **23** to ensure that wheel bearing IR emissions corresponding to the passing wheel **23** is captured. By using two wheel sensors and measuring a time between wheel detection pulses, a speed of the train may be determined and used to dynamically adjust a capture time relative to the wheel detection pulses to ensure that wheel bearing emissions are captured as the wheel passes the sensors **12**, **14**.

[**0031**] In an aspect of the invention, a sampling technique may be used to isolate a windowed portion **58** of the received IR temperature profile **50** provided to the processor **40** by a respective sensing element **29** of the sensor **12**, **14** of **FIG. 1**. The windowing technique may be employed to eliminate spurious IR signals outside the windowed portion **58** that may have been captured. A width **52** of the window **51** may be predetermined or dynamically adjusted to achieve capture of the desired windowed portion **58** of the profile **50** to eliminate undesired portions **63**, **64** of the waveform outside the window portion **58**. Such undesired portions may include IR emission profiles indicative of other components radiating IR energy in the vicinity of the wheel bearing, such as springs, exhaust pipes, or brake components. For example, the portion **63** exceeding an alarm threshold **66**, such as a temperature alarm threshold, may be ignored because the portion **63** is outside the desired potion **58** and may be indicative of IR energy radiated from another part of the train different from the bearing. In an aspect of the invention, the position of the window **51** may be adjusted to compensate for variations among railcars and or rail car components to ensure that at least one element **29** views a temperature peak portion of a component targeted.

[0032] **FIG. 15** shows rail wheel components contributing identifiable heat profiles superimposed over an exemplary IR radiation profile **50** received from a train wheel **23** by the detection system **10**. As shown, brake shoes **116** being applied to the wheel rim **112** create recognizable shoe temperature peaks **118** and rim temperature peaks **120**, while a cooler wheel plate **114** of the wheel **23** shows a cooler temperature valley **122** in the profile **50**. When analyzing the profile **50** to determine a hot wheel condition, the shoe temperature peaks **118** and rim temperature peaks **120** may be ignored because the wheel plate **114** temperature **122** is the temperature of interest. For example, **FIG. 16A** shows an exemplary graph of a sensed temperature profile **50** indicative of a braked wheel exhibiting shoe temperature peaks **118** and rim temperature peaks **120** but having a wheel temperature **122** below an alarm threshold **66**. **FIG. 16B** shows an exemplary graph of a sensed temperature profile **50** indicative of a braked wheel exhibiting shoe temperature peaks **118** and rim temperature peaks **120** and also exhibiting a hot wheel condition because the temperature **122** of the wheel plate is above the predetermined threshold **66**.

[0033] A position of the window **51** with respect to the IR profile **50** may be selected corresponding to detection of the wheel **23**, as indicated by wheel detection pulses **54**, **56**, so that the window **51** is relatively centered around the windowed portion **58**. In another embodiment, the windowed portion **58** may be selected to isolate a certain portion of the received IR energy of interest to be analyzed. In an aspect of the invention, the window **51** may be sized corresponding to a largest diameter bearing profile expected to be encountered, and a center position **53** of the window **51** may be selected to be at a middle of a profile **50** indicative of a centerline of the sensed bearing. **FIG. 13A** is a diagram showing respective areas of coverage **35** of exemplary IR scanning beams within a detection window **51** corresponding to a sensed bearing wherein **2** of **4** scanning beams fall within the window **51**. By utilizing the coverage of the **4** scan beams and dynamically selecting beams with best coverage based on detected heat signatures, a bearing temperature profile may be captured by at least one of the beams regardless of variations in truck positioning. For example, when scanning the inner bearing **20** of **FIG. 12**, at least some of beams intersect the inner bearing **20**, while others of the beams not intersecting the bearing **20** may be ignored. **FIG. 13B** shows an exemplary graph of a sensed temperature profile corresponding to the areas **35** scanned in **FIG. 13A**.

[0034] In another aspect the invention depicted in **FIG. 3**, sharp peak profiles **68** relative to an overall detected temperature profile **50**, for example, within a window, may be eliminated as being potentially erroneous readings. Such peak profiles **68** may be indicative of parasitic radiation or a reflection and may need to be filtered to allow an accurate determination of bearing temperature. For example, relatively sharp peaks profiles **68** may be identified by setting a threshold for variations in values of a series of samples over a predetermined time period and eliminating any data that indicates a peak profile **68** that is undesirably sharp compared to the overall detected temperature profile **50**.

[0035] In yet another aspect of the invention, heat sources near a well bearing being sensed, such as exhaust pipes, generators, and suspension components, may interfere with a temperature measurement of the bearing, possibly resulting in detecting an out of range temperature value for the bearing when in fact the bearing temperature is within a desired range. An improved train wheel bearing sensing system includes an IR radiation profile recognition process to identify a component of interest for a temperature measurement. The IR radiation profile recognition process correlates received IR energy to a known bearing configuration, and to filter out, for example, spurious or other IR energy not generated by the bearing configuration being sensed. For example, in **FIG. 1**, memory **42** may be configured for storing a plurality of known radiation profiles or parameters indicative of radiation profiles for respective bearings or axle profiles that are expected to be sensed by the system **10**. The processor **40** may be configured for comparing IR data received from the sensors **12**, **14** and accessing the memory **42** to correlate received IR data to a known profile or parameters indicative of a known profile to determine if a received IR profile matches a known profile. For example, the processor **40** may use curve matching techniques to compare curved portions of a known profile to portions of received profile to determine if the received profile matches a known profile. In another aspect, digital signal processing techniques, such as a Fast Fourier Transform, may be performed on the received signal to compare transformed parameters to known parameters.

[0036] **FIG. 4** shows an exemplary IR profile for a "W" type bearing heat signature. Known bearing profiles stored in memory **42** may be compared to the received profile **50** to verify that the received profile **50** is an accepted profile for making a bearing temperature measurement. Once a valid profile type is identified, the profile **50** may be checked to determine if it exceeds an alarm threshold **66**. Portions **63**, **64** of the received profile outside the window **51**, potentially indicative of other IR sources besides the bearing, may be disregard before making a comparison. If a received profile does not match a known profile, the measurement may be disregarded or flagged for further investigation.

[0037] In another aspect of the invention, emission data received from each of the plurality of sensing elements **29** for the same bearing may be compared to each other to assess a validity of each of the IR profiles provided by the respective sensing elements **29**. For example, if one or more IR profiles received from sensing elements **29** of a sensor includes IR energy components in addition to IR energy from a sensed bearing, (such as IR energy radiated by a gearbox adjacent to the sensed bearing) the IR profiles including non-bearing components may be filtered out by using pattern recognition techniques.

[0038] In yet another aspect of the invention, gradients **70**, **72** of a profile **50** may be measured to determine if an IR radiation measurement includes an IR component from another source. For example, brake disks positioned near wheel bearings are known to cause the gradients **70**, **72** a known IR profile **50** at the edges **74**, **76** of the evaluation window **51**, to be different than expected for the known profile. If one or more gradients **70**, **72** appear to be different than expected for a certain profile, then the received profile may be normalized to remove the effects of other IR components and matched to a known profile to make a bearing temperature determination.

[0039] **FIGS. 7-10** illustrate exemplary conditions of a train wheel and the corresponding IR signal profiles that may be obtained from one embodiment of a train wheel

bearing measurement system. For example, blockage of a portion of the wheel bearing and/or heat pipes and lubricant leakage may result in the IR profiles as shown in the IR output signal plot of **FIG. 7**, where each curve represents the output from a respective sensing element. Sun reflections and/or overheated outer disk brakes may result in the IR profiles as shown in the IR output signal plot of **FIG. 8**. Flying sparks from sliding wheels may result in the IR profiles as shown in the IR output signal plot of **FIG. 9**. For an inner bearing, the gear box and retaining parts may interfere with the inner bearing measurement producing the IR profiles as shown in the IR output signal plot of **FIG. 10**. Using the techniques described previously, such as windowing, peak detection, gradient detection, and pattern recognition, an actual bearing temperature may be extracted from the IR signal profiles.

[**0040**] In another aspect of the invention depicted in **FIG. 14**, specific portions of a bearing may be detected to analyze a heat signature for the bearing. For example, as shown in **FIG. 14**, specific bearing raceways, such as inner raceway **110** of an outer bearing **18**, may be targeted so that portions **33** of IR emissions corresponding to such components are received by a sensor for analysis. Heat profile information for the sensed portion may be used to pinpoint that portion of a bearing for inspection or repair. In yet another aspect of the invention, the information gathered via IR detection may be analyzed to implement impact and load detection, using for example, pattern recognition techniques of the received profiles **50**.

[**0041**] In another aspect of the invention, information acquired using the system **10** may be combined with information from other sources to verify and enhance rail undercarriage component health condition analysis. For example, information collected by other sensors, such as a rail deflection sensor **41**, may be associated with corresponding IR emission information collected by the system **10** indicative of a hot bearing condition may be used to verify detection of the condition. The association may be performed in the processor **41** or at a remote location, such as in the monitor **46**.

[**0042**] Based on the foregoing description, the methods described may be implemented using computer programming or engineering techniques including computer software, firmware, hardware or any combination or subset thereof, wherein the technical effect is to determine a condition of a rail vehicle undercarriage component exhibiting a scanned waveform signature corresponding to a type of the component in response to being scanned by a sensor. Any such resulting program, having computer-readable code means, may be embodied or provided within one or more computer-readable media, thereby making a computer program product, i.e., an article of manufacture, according to the invention. For example, computer readable media may contain program instructions for a computer program code for processing received imaging data indicative of images acquired in a vicinity of a locomotive. The computer readable media may also include a computer program code for processing received location data indicative of a geographic location of the locomotive when the images are being acquired. In addition, the computer readable media may include a computer program code for accessing a railroad landmark database comprising a plurality of railroad landmarks associated with respective geographic locations constituting landmark tags to correlate the landmark tags with the imaging data and the location data to generate landmark correlated image data.

[**0043**] The computer readable media may be, for example, a fixed (hard) drive, diskette, optical disk, magnetic tape, semiconductor memory such as read-only memory (ROM), etc., or any transmitting/receiving medium such as the Internet or other communication network or link. The article of manufacture containing the computer code may be made and/or used by executing the code directly from one medium, by copying the code from one medium to another medium, or by transmitting the code over a network.

[**0044**] One skilled in the art of computer science will be able to combine the software created as described with appropriate general purpose or special purpose computer hardware, such as a microprocessor, to create a computer system or computer sub-system embodying the method of the invention. An apparatus for making, using or selling the invention may be one or more processing systems including, but not limited to, a central processing unit (CPU), memory, storage devices, communication links and devices, servers, I/O devices, or any sub-components of one or more processing systems, including software, firmware, hardware or any combination or subset thereof, which embody the invention.

[**0045**] When mounted in railroad sleeper **24** of **FIG. 1**, the system **10** may be subject to vibration and mechanical stresses as a train travels over the sleeper **24**. **FIG. 5** illustrates a cross section of the sleeper **24** taken along line **5-5** and shows an improved suspension **88**, partially cut away, for the system **10** mounted within the sleeper **24**. The sleeper **24** may comprise a hollow shell portion **80** having a mounting cavity **84** and a cover **82** attached, for example around a top edge **86** shell **80**. The suspension **88** suspends a carrier **90** to which the components of the system **10**, such as sensors **12**,**14** (not shown) may be attached, and isolates the carrier **90**, and any system components attached thereto, from vibration and shock.

[**0046**] In an aspect of the invention, the suspension **88** includes a cover attachment portion **92** attached to the cover **82**, a carrier attachment portion **94** attached to the carrier **90**, and a deformable element **96** disposed between the cover attachment portion **92** and the carrier attachment portion **94** for allowing relative movement between the portions **92** and **94**. The deformable element **96** element may be attached to the either or both of the portions **92** and **94**.

[**0047**] In an embodiment depicted in **FIG. 6**, the deformable element **96** comprises a tubular element, such as a spring, which is deformable, for example, in cross section from a circular cross section **98** to an oval cross section **100** (indicated by the solid line oval) biased against a force **102** applied via the cover attachment portion **92**. The suspension **88** may include a deformation limiting member **104**, for example, partially enclosing the deformable element **96** to limit an amount of deformation experienced by the deformable element **96**. In an embodiment, the deformation limiting member **104** may comprise a "C"-shaped cross sectional shaped member having a size selected to limit a deformation of the deformable element **96** to a desired amount. The deformable element **96** may be attached to the cover attachment portion **92**, the carrier portion **94**, or both portions **92**, **94** to allow movement of the portions **92**, **94** relative to one another.

[0048] While the invention has been described in what is presently considered to be a preferred embodiment, many variations and modifications will become apparent to those skilled in the art. Accordingly, it is intended that the invention not be limited to the specific illustrative embodiment but be interpreted within the full spirit and scope of the appended claims.

1. A system for sensing a condition of a rail vehicle undercarriage component comprising;

a sensor comprising an array of infrared sensing elements, each of the elements aimed at a different region of a target area of a rail vehicle undercarriage component to generate respective scanning waveform signature data corresponding to each different region, the sensor oriented so that at least one of the elements receives unobstructed infrared emissions from the undercarriage component of a rail vehicle passing the sensor,

a memory for storing characteristic waveform signature data corresponding to known undercarriage components, and

a processor in communication with the sensor and the memory for processing the scanning waveform signature data with respect to the characteristic waveform signature data stored in memory to identify a type of the rail vehicle undercarriage component being scanned and to extract information indicative of a health condition of the rail vehicle undercarriage component being identified.

2. The system of claim 1, further comprising a wheel sensor generating wheel passage data for use by the processor to correlate wheel position with the scanning waveform signature data.

3. The system of claim 1, further comprising a rail deflection sensor generating rail deflection data for use by the processor to correlate sensed rail deflection with the scanning waveform signature data.

4. The system of claim 1, further comprising a transmitter for transmitting health information to a device remote from the processor.

5. The system of claim 4, wherein the transmitter comprises a receiver for receiving information from the remote device.

6. The system of claim 1, further comprising a database in communication with the processor for providing train reference information for a train being scanned by the system.

7. The system of claim 1, wherein the sensor is disposed to aim the elements at an acute angle with respect to an orientation of the component of the rail vehicle undercarriage.

8. The system of claim 7, wherein the component comprises an outer wheel bearing of a rail wheel axle.

9. The system of claim 7, wherein the component comprises a wheel face of a rail wheel.

10. The system of claim 1, wherein the sensor further comprises a calibration element receiving infrared radiation from a temperature standard for use in calibrating the other elements of the sensor.

11. The system of claim 1, wherein the different regions at least partially overlap one another.

12. A method for determining a condition of a rail vehicle undercarriage component exhibiting a scanned waveform signature corresponding to a type of the component In response to being scanned by a sensor, the method comprising:

acquiring scanned waveform signature data corresponding to a rail vehicle undercarriage component being scanned by a sensor;

identifying a type of the rail vehicle undercarriage component based on the received scanned waveform signature data; and

processing the acquired scanned waveform signature data to determine a condition of the component based on an identified type of component.

13. The method of claim 12, wherein identifying a type of the rail vehicle undercarriage component comprises comparing the acquired scanned waveform signature data to at least one of a plurality of known characteristic waveform signatures.

14. The method of claim 12, wherein processing the acquired scanned waveform signature data comprises filtering the data to remove information not characteristic of the identified type.

15. The method of claim 12, wherein processing the acquired scanned waveform signature data comprises determining when a portion of the data exceeds a preset threshold.

16. The method of claim 12, wherein processing the acquired scanned waveform signature data comprises correlating a sensed rail wheel position with corresponding waveform signature data acquired for undercarriage components associated with the wheel.

17. The method of claim 16, further comprising generating a window of desired waveform signature data based on a correlation of the sensed rail wheel position with the corresponding scanned waveform signature data.

18. The method of claim 17, further comprising ignoring portions of the scanned waveform signature data outside the window.

19. The method of claim 17, wherein the rail vehicle undercarriage component being scanned comprises a wheel, a wheel bearing or an axle.

20. Computer readable media containing program instructions for determining a condition of a rail vehicle undercarriage component exhibiting a scanned waveform signature corresponding to a type of the component in response to being scanned by a sensor, the computer readable media comprising:

a computer program code for acquiring scanned waveform signature data corresponding to a rail vehicle undercarriage component being scanned by a sensor;

a computer program code for identifying a type of the rail vehicle undercarriage component based on the received scanned waveform signature data; and

a computer program code for processing the acquired scanned waveform signature data to determine a condition of the component based on an identified type of component

21. A method for determining a condition of a rail vehicle undercarriage component comprising:

scanning a rail vehicle undercarriage component with an array of sensors, each sensor aimed at a different region of a scanned target area of the component, to generate

respective scanned waveform signature data corresponding to each different region;

processing the data to identify a type of the rail vehicle undercarriage component being scanned; and

filtering the data according to an identified type of the component to remove information not characteristic of the identified type.

22. The method of claim 21, wherein filtering comprises truncating information corresponding to an undesired region of the target area.

23. The method of claim 21, wherein the different regions at least partially overlap one another.

24. A suspension apparatus for a hollow railway sleeper housing rail wheel undercarriage sensing equipment, the sleeper having a shell defining an equipment suspension cavity; a cover enclosing the equipment suspension cavity; and an equipment carrier disposed within the cavity, the suspension apparatus comprising:

a cover attachment portion for attachment to the cover;

an equipment carder attachment portion spaced away from the cover attachment portion for attachment to the equipment carrier; and

a deformable element disposed between the cover attachment portion and the equipment carrier attachment portion for allowing relative movement between the cover and the equipment carrier so that the equipment carrier is isolated from vibration and shock imparted to the sleeper.

25. The suspension apparatus of claim 24, wherein the deformable element comprises a radially deformable tubular element longitudinally disposed between the cover attachment portion and the equipment carrier attachment portion.

26. The suspension apparatus of claim 25, wherein the radially deformable tubular element comprises a spring.

27. The suspension apparatus of claim 24, further comprising a limiting member limiting deformation of the deformable element.

28. The suspension apparatus of claim 24, wherein the limiting member comprises a tubular member having a "C" shaped cross section longitudinally disposed partially around the deformable element.

29. The system of claim 1, wherein the component comprises an inner bearing of a rail wheel axle.

30. The system of claim 1, wherein the sensor is disposed between parallel rails of a railway over which the rail vehicle travels.

31. The system of claim 1, wherein the sensor is disposed in a railbed of a railway over which the rail vehicle travels.

32. The system of claim 31, wherein the sensor is disposed in a sleeper embedded in the railbed.

33. A system for sensing a condition of a rail vehicle undercarriage component from a location between parallel rails of a railway over which a rail vehicle travels, the system comprising:

a sensor disposed between parallel rails of a railway for scanning an undercarriage component of a rail vehicle for travel on the railway proximate the sensor and for generating scanning data corresponding to the undercarriage component being scanned; and

a processor in communication with the sensor for processing the scanning data to extract information from the data Indicative of a health condition of the undercarriage component.

34. The system of claim 33, wherein the sensor is disposed in a railbed of the railway between the parallel rails.

35. The system of claim 34, wherein the sensor is disposed in a sleeper embedded in the railbed.

36. The system of claim 33, wherein the sensor comprises an infrared sensor for receiving an infrared emission from the scanned component.

37. The system of claim 33, wherein the component comprises an inner bearing of a rail wheel axle.

38. The system of claim 33, wherein the component comprises a rail wheel.

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